

**JUDICIARY COMMITTEE
TESTIMONY OF RABBI MICHAEL PINCUS**

**IN SUPPORT OF SB 280: AN ACT REVISING
THE PENALTY FOR CAPITAL FELONIES**

March 14, 2012

My name is Rabbi Michael Pincus. I am the Rabbi of Congregation Beth Israel, a Reform synagogue in West Hartford, Connecticut. I submit this testimony in support of *SB 280: An Act Revising the Penalty for Capital Felonies* in my personal capacity, not on behalf of the Congregation.

Since 1958, the Union of Reform Judaism has formally opposed the death penalty. Resolutions adopted by the Movement since then, have affirmed that "there is no crime for which the taking of human life by society is justified, and that it is the obligation of society to evolve other methods in dealing with crime."

Though Biblical law mandates the death penalty for 36 offenses, over 2,000 years of rabbinic wisdom teach us to reject an ultimate punishment that removes even the possibility of redemption and rehabilitation. Rabbinic interpretations effectively abolished the death penalty centuries ago and, with the rarest of exceptions, Jewish courts have refused to punish criminals by depriving them of their lives.

Jewish teachers have taught that the repetition of the word *tzedek*/justice in the biblical injunction *Tzedek, tzedek, tirdof*, "Justice, justice you shall pursue," (Deuteronomy 16:20), is repeated to teach us that we must be just in our pursuit of justice, that our means must be as just as our ends. In an op-ed addressing this issue, Rabbi Marc Gruber of Rockville Centre, New York posed the question, "How will we respond when our children ask, Why do we kill people who kill people?"

The suffering of victims of violence and their families is profound, and each of them deserves to know that the perpetrators of such violence are held accountable. But I believe, that Justice, not vengeance, is what we should aim to dispense in our state's criminal justice system. Capital Punishment is unethical and falls short of our highest ideals to which we aspire.

I urge the Connecticut legislature to resist the entreaties of those who call for vengeance, retribution and death and to seek instead repentance and rehabilitation from our state's wrongdoers.

Respectfully submitted,

Rabbi Michael Pincus